

## Presidential Speech at Opening Ceremony

Your Majesty, Honourable Mr. Prime Minister, Honoured Guests and Friends.

At this 13th Triennial World Conference of the Associated Country Women of the World, I have the great privilege and honour to welcome the honoured guests, delegates and visitors. We feel greatly honoured that His Majesty, the King of Norway, is present among us. His presence at the opening ceremony has given this Conference an added importance. We also greatly appreciate the presence of the Honourable Prime Minister of Norway, whose interest in social welfare is well known.

Today is the opening of an Assembly of Women of many nations and many countries, from all the continents. We have come together to discuss our problems, our success, and our failures, and to learn from each other how to build bridges, to cross the voids created by different ideologies, political situations and economic conditions. It is an interesting characteristic of the present age that as we are coming closer through rapid communications, we become increasingly aware of the gaps between people, between nations and between human beings and their environment.

In this desert of conflicting ideologies, we who are working in the field of social service are like a lost caravan, always seeking the way to our ultimate goal of creating a life of harmony.

We, the 6½ million members of the Associated Country Women of the World, have pledged ourselves to work together, not recognizing the artificial barriers of race, colour, creed or religion, but it is easier said than followed, in our own lives. We live under diverse political systems and observe different rules; we cannot live totally ignoring our environment. The point is, how can we achieve our objective of creating a world of mutual understanding and assistance in spite of our diverse environments?

In recent times we have looked at the world from outer space, which the tremendous progress of science has made a reality, through pictures and television. The world looks so beautiful, safe and serene in its orbit, as we look at it through the camera held by the astronauts. One wonders how true is that picture of earth. The people who have made earth beautiful and alive are also taking away that beauty and serenity, not only through physical destruction and war, but also by widening the gaps, through political creeds and hatred.



Delegates from Brazil, Giovanna Battarelli and Louisa Bueno Gomm.

We are optimists. We are not willing to accept life as it is today, we long to alleviate evil; we are not willing to admit that we have reached a point of no return, but believe that we can build the stairway to bridge the gaps, and we have come together to find out the method. Victor Hugo has said, "There is nothing as powerful as an idea, whose time has come." It is we, the individuals, who can translate that idea into reality. We can usher in world peace before Atomic destruction overtakes mankind. It is therefore necessary to get everyone involved in the creation of peace structure for the world, a structure strong enough to replace force as the controlling factor in the fate of mankind. It will be only a mere play of words and a pious hope, if we do not try to build up this structure to meet the basic needs of human life. The path to create peace is a difficult one, and the only route through the maze of frustrated hopes and dead ends, is by the creation of an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding.